Certain Religious Elements in the English Doctrine of the Inspired Poet During the Renaissance

A Portion of

THE CONTINUITY OF THE LITERARY TRADITION OF THE INSPIRED POET

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF UNIVERSITY STUDIES OF THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY IN CONFORMITY WITH THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1939

BY

COURTLAND DARKE BAKER

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THESIS SUMMARY

This thesis is an attempt (1) to survey the extent and significance of the doctrine of the divinely inspired poet in the literature of the English Renaissance, and (2) to examine more fully the bases, classical and Christian, upon which this doctrine rested. The various chapters, accordingly, trace the history of an idea which possessed from its earliest appearance in European literature to its decline in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, marked religio-literary connotations.

Two main traditions were responsible for the widespread popularity of the inspirationist theory in Renaissance literature. The first of these was the classical formulation of the doctrine, which had its inception in the writings of Homer and Hesiod and which, in varying forms and emphasis, lasted until the decline of classical latin literature. This has here been termed the " orthodox " tradition, the term " orthodox " here signifying the conventional, frequently rhetorical phraseologies inherited by the Renaissance from their classical predecessors, from such poets as Hesiod, Pindar, and Virgil; from such theorists as Plato and Cicero. In connection with the doctrine of inspiration a survey of the classical cult of the Muses has been made in this study; and the continuity of the tradition of the Muses through certain literary monuments of the Middle Ages has been indicated. The term, " Gothic Muse," is here used collectively to designate the various significations attached to the words *Muse* and *Muses* in mediaeval literature.

From the evidence assembled, it is clear that by the sixteenth century the Muses had become pure allegorical abstractions, a fairly complicated set of symbolisms having become centered around their names. Collectively or singly, their names had become associated with the disciplines of the Liberal Arts, in particular, with rhetoric and astronomy, and associated with the various literary genres and with the allegorizing techniques. The earliest extant reference to the Muses by an English poet occurs in Aldhelm; Chaucer is the first English poet extensively to employ the devices of invocation to the Muses; but he is easily surpassed in this by Lydgate and the other important

fifteenth-century poets. To the widespread diffusion of the lore of the Muses, the poets, the encyclopaedists, and the mythographers alike contributed.

The second tradition profoundly influencing the Renaissance inspirationists was the specifically Christian doctrine of inspiration, having its basis in the prophetic tradition of the Old Testament and in the post-Apostolic development of a doctrine of theological inspiration. A main thesis in this study is that the Christian religio-poetic tradition by contrast with the classical is a more powerful influence upon the Renaissance inspirationist poets, that we must look in this Christian tradition for the kinetic values of the doctrine of the divinely inspired poet. An alternative term, "latitudinarian inspiration," has been proposed for the conventional "poetic inspiration" because of the disposition of the Renaissance writers, notably in England, to borrow from theological concepts. Accordingly, a considerable body of evidence has been assembled which seems to justify the conclusion that the Renaissance theory of latitudinarian, or poetic inspiration rested upon, and was in the main nourished by, the theological theory of the *ad extra* or gratuitous graces, *charismata data*, belonging by appropriation to the Holy Spirit which, in turn, benevolently bestows these upon favored human beings.

A review of both the classical and the Christian religio-poetic traditions seems to point unmistakably to the latter as the principal sustaining influence upon the English inspirationist poets. If this conclusion is correct, the classical tradition served as a body of beliefs sustaining and confirming the Christian elements in the doctrine.

The chief English inspirationist poets were Skelton, Edmund Spenser, George Chapman, George Wither, John Donne, and John Milton. The English inspirationist poets did not form at any time a cohesive group comparable to the remarkably numerous group of French inspirationists centering around the Pléiade coterie. Perhaps for this reason marked individual differences in the acceptance of the doctrine may be noted in the English poets. Above all, in the writings of the English inspirationists the moral implications of the doctrine are pronounced, a position influenced in the main, it would appear, by the Old Testament tradition of the prophets and poets.

[Reprinted from *ELH, A Journal of English Literary History,* Vol. 6, No. 4, December, 1939.]

CERTAIN RELIGIOUS ELEMENTS IN THE ENGLISH DOCTRINE OF THE INSPIRED POET DURING THE RENAISSANCE

By Courtland D. Baker

1

"God maketh his habytacion In Poetes . . .," wrote John Skelton in his *Replication,* "And soiourns with them and dwelles."[1] This strongly affirmative statement is characteristic of a great deal of Tudor and Stuart verse; it is repeated again and again from Skelton's age through Milton's. The belief that God confers his endowment of inspiration upon the poets, enabling them to write, occurs also in the critical literature of the period. It was presumably the widespread diffusion of this idea which led Sir Francis Bacon to remark that poetry "was ever thought to have some participation of divineness."[2] Avowals of the doctrine of the inspired poet, with the frequently associated allegorical symbolisms of the Nine Muses, are so common in the literature of the English Renaissance that an anthology of respectable size could easily be garnered to illustrate the pervasiveness of the idea.[3]

The explicit formulation of the doctrine of the inspired poet first appeared in the literatures of Greece and Rome. When the relevant passages dealing with the concept in Renaissance verse and criticism are closely examined, the assumption that the English doctrine rests wholly upon, or is drawn directly from,

[1] Skelton, *Works,* ed. A. Dyce (London, 1843), 1.222; for a recent discussion this poem as an attack upon contemporary religious heresies, see William Nelson, *John Skelton, Laureate* (New York, 1939), pp. 212-218.

[2] Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning,* ed. W. A. Wright (Oxford, 1926), p. 102. Compare Bacon's "Of Adversitie": "And the Pencill of the holy Ghost hath laboured more in describing the Afflictions of Iob then the Felicitie of Salomon" (*Essays,* ed. A. S. West, Cambridge, 1926, p. 13). John Gower expressed the idea quite as succinctly: "Quod deus hortatur, michi scribi penna paratur" (*Works,* ed. G. C. Macaulay, Oxford, 1902, p. 346).

[3] Warner F. Patterson in his exhaustive *Three Centuries of French Poetic Theory,* University of Michigan Publications in Language and Literature, 14 and 15, 1935, has compiled such an anthology for French inspirationist verse. The method has much to commend it, since thereby one can see the ramifications of the belief in the doctrine of the inspired poet.

classical antiquity, plainly needs to be modified. With this general point of view in mind, the present article proposes to deal with certain elements indubitably Christian and religious in origin, substantiating and confirming the age-old traditional concepts of poetic inspiration. Even if the entire literature and thought of antiquity had perished, it is entirely conceivable to suppose that the poetry of the late Middle Ages and of the Renaissance would have contained, nonetheless, an avowal of belief in the divine participation of the human creative mind with that of Deity, so firmly rooted is this belief in certain characteristic modes of thought inherent in Christian doctrine.

Stripped to its essential meaning, the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the poet connotes a propulsive energy, variable in intensity and and intermittent in occurrence, gratuitously and miraculously endowed upon a human being by a supernatural agent. When this divine afflatus is upon the poet, he is enabled to write; without it, he is helpless, becoming that " uninspired " thing, the poetaster. In the terms commonly employed, " divine inspiration," " fury," " mania," " enthusiasm," and the like, one connotation is always clear, that of kinetic energy. The divine being is the agent, or causative principle, while the human poet is the instrument. Where any suggestion of automatism enters—and this is, on the whole, infrequent in Renaissance verse—the poet becomes a passive instrument, acting simply as the transmitter of divine thought to mankind. Whatever we may think of this belief, whatever we may choose to call it—a pre-scientific hypothesis, one of the persistent idols of European thought, an a-logical psychological theory—one fact is clear: it was sincerely believed in by a large number of poets, whom we may term the genuine inspirationist poets, for reasons closely allied with orthodox Christian thought.

Within the area of religious experience, the Christian theologians have recognized various types of inspiration. The first is plenary inspiration, in which the human being, face to face with Deity, receives directly the divine thought, as Moses did on Mount Sinai. A second type is that of mantic or prophetic inspiration. A third is mystical illumination vouchsafed to certain of the saints and mystics; the visitation of Pentecost with its gift of tongues is a prototype of this sort of divine revelation.

These types of inspiration, all of which are contained in the Old or the New Testaments, directly concern the problem of the canonicity of Scripture.[4] In the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, because of the overwhelming influence of religion upon every aspect of human life and because of its endowing all human activities with a purposive value, the poets and the apologists for poetry sought to connect with literature this divine inspiration acknowledged to be the leavening, vitalizing spirit of Holy Writ.[5] The theory of the divine inspiration of the poet becomes a distinctly "latitudinarian" belief, to apply to it a term from seventeenth-century religious history. It borrows widely and variously from religious orthodox thought, as well as from literary history and criticism. But after we have made full allowance for the powerful, cumulative effect of the classical tradition on the literature of the English Renaissance, we must recognize that another, even more powerful tradition manifested itself there: the Hebraic-Christian tradition of the prophet and the truly divine poet, like David, the servant of the thought of God. If this position is correct, the classical hypotheses of inspiration had a confirmatory, supporting value for the Christian latitudinarian conception of the poetic inspiration.[6]

[4] Adolf von Harnack, *Dogmengeschichte* (3rd. ed. Leipzig, 1898), pp. 156-163; for a concise survey of the question, see B. F. Westcott, *Introduction to the Study of the Gospels* (Boston, 1863), pp. 399-444; Schaff-Herzog, *Encyclopaedia of Religious Knowledge,* ed. S. M. Jackson (New York, 1910), vi, 12-19; C. J. Costello, *St. Augustine's Doctrine on the Inspiration and Canonicity of Scripture* (Washington, 1930), pp. 113-114.

[5] It is imperative for students of the English Renaissance to realize that the influence of religion is nearly as strong then as earlier. "So all important was the subject of religion in every department of Renaissance life that those who seek to know the sources of Elizabethan thought must turn to it" (Hardin Craig, *The Enchanted Glass,* Oxford, 1936, p. 49).

[6] Typical of many passages in Renaissance literature illustrating the blending of the pagan and Christian traditions is this from Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia* (1598): "As the holy Prophets and sanctified apostles could neuer haue foretold nor spoken of such supernaturall matters vnlesse they had bin inspired of God: so *Cicero* in his Tusculane questions is of that minde, that a Poet cannot expresse verses aboundantly, sufficiently, and fully . . . without celestiall instruction; which Poets themselues do very often and gladly witnes of themselues, as namely *Ouid in 6. Fast. Est deus in nobis: agitante calescimus illo.* And our Famous English Poet Spenser, who in his *Sheepeheardes Calender* lamenting the decay of Poetry at these dayes, saith most sweetly to the same" (Meres, *Palladis Tamia,* in *Elizabethan Critical Essays,* ed. Smith, 2. 313). This passage, lifted almost bodily from William Webbe's *A Discourse of English Poetrie* (*ibid.,* 1. 231-232), comes ultimately from

The problem under discussion here concerns (1) the analogies between the rôle of the prophet and the poet; (2) the poetic inspiration as a gratuitous, or *ad extra*, theological grace. " The infusion of grace," Hooker remarked in one of his sermons, " hath her sundry after-meals." [7] The conception of the divine inspiration of secular verse as a sundry after-meal of theological grace effectively illustrates the essential character of Renaissance poetic, or latitudinarian inspiration.

2

The problem of the post-Apostolic Christian writers respecting the divine inspiration was that primarily of finding proofs of the continued bestowal of God's thought and gifts upon mankind. These had been conferred upon the writers of the Old and New Testament; upon that there was unanimous agreement; did writers still continue to be dowered? This question was an enormously important one. A great deal of the metaphysics and theology of the Middle Ages bears directly or indirectly upon this. In contrast to the close reasoning of metaphysical and theological argument, the poetic method very often cuts through to the direct, unequivocal statement of a problem; thus, it is characteristic of the method of poets to find Isidore of Seville boldly asserting that the Christian writers drink from the fountains of faith (" fonte evangelico).[8] The bases of such a conviction are manifold and complex. For the Christian poets, as well as for the theologians and metaphysicians, the divine inspiration of Moses and of the Old Testament prophets was the prototype of all later varieties; since the inspiration of Moses was plenary, the prophetic inspiration became the direct prototype.[9]

The evidences in the Old Testament concerning divine inspiration revealed that it had been conferred upon all sorts of

the *Polyanthea* of Dominicus Nannus Mirabellus; see Meres, *Poetrie*, ed. D. C. Allen (Urbana, 1933), pp. 42-43.

[7] Richard Hooker, " Sermon on Justification," in *Works*, ed. John Keble (Oxford, 1845) 3.488.

[8] From Isidore's verses inscribed on the walls of the episcopal palace at Seville; see C. H. Beeson, *Isidore-Studien* (Munich, 1913), p. 161.

[9] See William Sanday, *Inspiration: Eight Lectures on the Early History and Origin of the Doctrine of Biblical Inspiration* (Bampton Lectures for 1893), p. 128.

men for various kinds of human activities. The inspiration of God connoted a creative or vitalizing force, involving God's creation of the world and man, the literal breathing-in of life upon inanimate matter (Gen. 1: 2, Job 26: 13, Isaiah 32: 15); the propagating or sustaining of created life (Job 10: 12, 34: 12-14, Psalms 104: 30); the source of reason and intellect in man (Job 32: 8); or the source of special gifts and endowments (Gen. 41: 38, Exodus 28: 3, 32: 16). The inspiration might be particularized as in the case of Bezaleel and Aholiab, the chosen architects of the Temple (Exodus 31: 1-6); similarly, it explained the military skill of Joshua (Deut. 34: 9), the valor of Samson (Judges 13: 25, 14: 6), the wisdom of the lawgivers, poets, and prophets (Numbers 11: 17, 25-29, 2 Sam. 23: 2, 1 Kings 22: 19-23, Ezekiel 11: 5, Daniel 4: 8-9, 5: 11), and individual qualities of moral strength (Nehemiah 9: 20, Psalms 51: 11, Isaiah 59: 21, Ezekiel 36: 27). Famous among all these texts and one of the most widely quoted was Job 32: 8: "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding."[10] In the extra-canonical Apocrypha, Esdras recounted the miraculous inspiration by which five men wrote two hundred and four books in forty days (2 Esdras 14: 38-44). The divine inspiration was not restricted solely to the professional priestly class; the pervasiveness of the supernatural endowments in all human actions is a characteristic of early inspirationist theories, as true in Homer as in the Bible.

Even within the Old Testament, the differences between plenary and prophetic inspiration were clearly recognized. The thoughts of God were dictated to Moses; some primitivistic bias is apparent in the belief that only in happier ages Deity spoke directly to human beings. After this age had passed, there was the problem of designating the proper intermediaries between God and man. Such an intermediary was the *Malach*, or messenger of the Lord.[11] Later the *Malach* was superseded by the

[10] All references to the Bible and the Apocrypha are from the so-called Authorized Versions of 1611 and 1629.

[11] W. J. Beale, *Divine Causation* (London, 1937), pp. 132-174. "The existence of intermediary beings in the imagination of man," Beale remarks elsewhere, "is seen to be a relic of animism retained to give a semblance of coherence to a conception so strongly imbued with materialism as to interpret transcendence in terms

ideal figure of the man of God, the *nabi* or prophet, the human messenger of God and God-sent.[12]

In addition to their divine inspiration, the prophets seem to have influenced later Christian thought in another direction. This was their assumption of a definite mission and responsibilities towards mankind; they felt themselves impelled towards moral uplift, exhortation, and reform, to actions which a man like Milton instantly responded. Prophecy, however, was not an office; it was a divine gift or grace (Ephesians 4: 11. In the last analysis, the prophets, therefore, were interpreters of the thought of God, or, as we might term it, genuinely

of space" (*ibid.*, p. 251). This remark is directly applicable to the Nine Muses in classical mythology.

[12] For a full discussion of these problems, see Alfred Jepsen, *Nabi: Soziologische Studien zur Alttestamentlichen Literatur- und Religionsgeschichte*, Munich, 1934. The belief in the *Malach* died out slowly, as the pen-name of the prophet Malachi indicates. Later Jewish thought, like Christian, felt the need of certifying the continuance of God's inspiration. Talmudic theology held that, although the special inspiration of the Old Testament prophets was no longer vouchsafed, God's thoughts were communicated through the Holy Spirit or through the *Bath Kol* (or *Bat Kol*), the Daughter of the Voice of God (see Max Wiener, "Bat Kol," in *Jüdisches Lexikon*, ed. G. Herlitz and B. Kirschner, Berlin, 1930, 1. 756). The Hebrew *Neum Yahiveh* being equivalent to "thus saith Jehovah," the *Bat Kol* was thus the echo of this Voice. For the suggestive remark of E. E. Kellett that Milton may have been influenced in his conception of Urania by the rabbinical tradition of the *Bat Kol*, see his *Reconsiderations* (Cambridge, 1928), pp. 198-199. The *Targum*, the recognized interpretation of the prophetic writings by Jonathan Ben Uzziel, was held to be divinely inspired (see the *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, ed. Singer, New York, 1925, 6. 607). In all these instances of belief in the divine inspiration of human works, examples of which might almost be indefinitely multiplied, there appears to be the expression of a psychological need for reliance upon something larger and better and more perfect than human beings can achieve, an admission of the finite limitations of man. "Haec igitur visio non potest advenire intellectui creato," wrote St. Thomas Aquinas in *Cont. Gent.* iii, 52, "nisi per actionem Dei" (cited from Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Mediaeval Philosophy*, trans. A. H. C. Downes, New York, 1936, p. 257; see also pp. 267-268, for a masterly summary of the philosophical belief in the divine oversight of God during the Middle Ages). The weakness of man, his insufficiency, physical, mental, and moral, is quite as pronounced in mediaeval literature as that contempt of life which Mr. Willard Farnham has so excellently discussed in *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Berkeley, 1936). For those accepting the Augustinian doctrine of the depravity of man, there was an added reason for supposing that his best thoughts were not his, but those of Deity. Most often, however, the simple pietistic view expressed in the famous *Veni creator*:

> "Veni creator spiritus
> Mentes tuorum visita,
> Imple superna gratia,
> Quae tu creasti pectora"

summarized the theory of the poets.

creative writers. As analogical prototypes for the Christian poets, they were much closer than were the earlier intermediaries, such as the *Malach*. The gradual change in Hebraic thought from direct contact with Deity, through the intermediaries, to the types of the God-sent man, had the effect not of lessening but of increasing what we may call the psychological communion between God and man. The prophets, Origen held, were selected by Divine Providence to receive the Holy Ghost and to be the depositories of God's oracles because of the unequalled purity and nobility of their lives.[13]

There were, of course, other factors contributing to the Christian belief in inspiration. The infiltration of Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought, the emphasis of Gnosticism upon the immediacy of revelation, Christian Stoicism, the influence of the mystery cults, all these enormously complex intellectual currents in early Christian thought tended to encourage, and did nothing to discourage, the belief that God mysteriously bestowed his thought on mankind. The result was, as De Wulf has put it, " Christian dogma and Christian ethics permeated the whole fabric, no activity being exempted from their influence." [14] Let us notice the comment of Roger Bacon on the wisdom of the philosophers:

> The third reason why the wisdom of philosophy is reduced to the divine wisdom is that God not only has enlightened their minds for the acquisition of a knowledge of wisdom, but they have secured it from him, and he has revealed, presented, and given it to them.[15]

As authorities for the divine inspiration of philosophy, Bacon cited Aristotle, St. Augustine, and Cicero, adding as an afterthought: " Whence he [Cicero] also says that not even a poet has poured forth a theme filled with weighty meaning without

[13] Origen, *Contra Celsum* vii. cap. 7 (*Library of the Ante-Nicene Christian Fathers*, 23, 1872. 430). For a glowing tribute to the Old Testament poets, see Sidney's *Apologie*, in *Elizabethan Critical Essays* 1. 158: "Against these none will speak that hath the holie Ghost in due holy reuerence," Sidney writes, adding in a view characteristic of the English Renaissance, that the verse of Amphion, Orpheus, and Homer contains " a full wrong diuinitie."

[14] Maurice De Wulf, *Philosophy and Civilization in the Middle Ages* (Vanuxem Lectures, Princeton, 1922), p. 103.

[15] Roger Bacon, *Opus Majus*, trans. R. B. Burke (Philadelphia, 1928), I. 48. 39-65, *passim*.

some divine instigation of mind." [16] These views of Bacon's had been emphasized by a long line of theologians, of whom we may consider St. Augustine and his view of divine inspiration as typical. In his writings the divine aid is unequivocally admitted—a human being, inspired by Deity, revealed the divine thought as fully and completely as God desired, since, in reality, it was God speaking through the human agent.[17] This guidance supervised the work of the Septuagint translators; [18] and in words strongly reminiscent of Cicero's St. Augustine remarked of his own " creative " work, *De Civitate*, that Providence had overseen it.[19] In discussing poetry St. Augustine was, on the whole, rigoristic, his interest being principally in the theological poets (*De Civitate Dei*, XVIII, cap. 14, " De theologi poetis ") and in asserting the priority in time and the superiority of the Old Testament prophet-poets. To these men some fifteen chapters of *De Civitate* were devoted.

The preoccupation of the theologians with the Old Testament prophets was a direct consequence of their researches. At a distance, the poetry of a given period follows the thinking of its philosophers and theologians; at least, this is true of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance. The poets were, in their fashion, as eager to maintain the values of morality as were the theologians; thus we find Thomas Wilson commenting in his *Arte of Rhetorique:*

The Poetes were wisemen, and wished in hart the redresse of things, the which when for feare, they durst not openly rebuke, they did

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[16] For the Ciceronian " inflammatione animorum," see *Pro Archia poeta* 18; *De Oratore* II, 46, 194; *De Divinatione* I, 80. Compare *Tusculan Disputations* I, 64: " Mihi vero ne haec quidem notiora et inlustriora carere videntur, ut ego aut poetam grave plenumque carmen sine caelesti aliquo mentis instinctu putem fundere, aut eloquentam sine maiore quadam vi fluere abundantem sonantibus verbis uberibusque sententiis." That Cicero genuinely believed in the doctrine of divine inspiration may be questioned; however, by his adducing the authority of Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus in the passages noted above, Cicero had much to do with connecting these men with the Renaissance beliefs, for these passages are part and parcel of the sixteenth-century commentaries (see above, p. 302, note 6). Sidney appears to have borrowed from Cicero the phrase, " force of a diuine breath " in his *Apologie* (see Smith, *op. cit.*, 1. 157).

[17] St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XVIII, cap. 41; compare: "Apostolus autem spiritu sancto locutus ait " (*ibid.*, IX, cap. 20). Like St. Augustine, Tertullian, Irenaeus, Origen, and Hippolytus were in agreement that the divine inspiration was transmitted through the Holy Ghost (Sanday, *Inspiration*, pp. 31-34).

[18] *Ibid.*, XVIII, cap. 43. [19] *Ibid.*, XI, cap. 1.

in colours painte them out, and tolde men by shadowes what they should doe in good sooth, or els because the wicked were unworthie to heare the trueth, they spake so that none might understande but those unto whom they please to utter their meaning, and knewe them to be men of honest conversation.[20]

Men who wrote verse with such objectives as Wilson detailed were no idle singers of an empty day; their work was produced, not for its aesthetic satisfactions but for its implicit—and explicit—moral viewpoints, for its sage and serious doctrine. For such men it was almost inevitable that they should turn to the fountainhead of their poetic faith, the Bible itself and those God-sent men, the Old Testament prophets and poets.

From among many English examples of verse embodying the prophetic tradition, John Donne's poem on the metrical translation of the Psalms by Sir Philip Sidney and the Countess of Pembroke is here quoted in part:

> Fixe we our prayses therefore on this one,
> That, as thy blessed Spirit fell upon
> These Psalmes first Author in a cloven tongue;
> (For 'twas a double power by which he sung
> The highest matter in the noblest forme;)
> So thou hast cleft that spirit, to performe
> That worke againe, and shed it, here, upon
> Two, by their bloods, and by thy Spirit one;
> A Brother and a Sister made by thee
> The Organ, where thou are the Harmony . . .
> Make all this All, three Quires, heaven, earth, and sphears;
> The first, Heaven, hath a song, but no man heares,
> The Spheares have Musick, but they have no tongue,
> Their harmony is rather danc'd than sung;
> But our third Quire, to which the first gives eare,
> (For, Angels learne by what the Church does here)
> This Quire hath all. The Organist is hee
> Who hath tun'd God and Man, the Organ we:
> The songs are these, which heavens high holy Muse
> Whispered to David, David to the Iewes:
> And Davids Successors, in holy zeale,
> In formes of joy and art doe re-veale
> To us so sweetly and sincerely too.[21]

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[20] Thomas Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique* (1560), ed. G. H. Mair (Oxford, 1909), pp. 195-196.

[21] John Donne, " Vpon the translation of the Psalmes by Sir Philip Sidney, and the Countesse of Pembroke, his Sister," in *Poems,* ed. H. J. C. Grierson (Oxford, 1912),

The echoes of a rich and complex intellectual heritage are heard in these lines of Donne's: the poet is conscious of his being in the line of David's successors. Similarly, in Donne's "First Anniversary," God is portrayed as making a "last, and lasting'st peece, a song," giving it then to Moses;[22] God is portrayed as a poet-musician in the description of "God's great Venite" at the Last Judgement.[23] The "Eagle-sighted Prophets" are described in Donne's "Litanie" as "Those heavenly Poets which did see Thy will, and it expresse In rhythmique feet."[24] These are the poems of Donne when he had turned to "the wyfe of [his] age, Divinity," to the sage and serious themes of the Christian tradition.

In the entire literature of inspiration there is perhaps no more explicit (certainly, no more charming) description of the divine endowments than in these verses of Robert Herrick:

> 'Tis not ev'ry day, that I
> Fitted am to prophesie:
> No, but when the spirit fils
> The fantastick pannicles:
> Full of fier; then I write
> As the Godhead doth indite.
> Thus inrag'd, my lines are hurl'd,
> Like the Sybells, through the world.
> Look how next the holy fier
> Either slakes, or doth retire;
> So the fancie cooles, till when
> That brave Spirit comes agen.[25]

These brief couplets might be taken almost as an epitome of the doctrine of the divinely inspired poet—the prophetic element, the Pentecostal image of inspiration as fire, the dictation of the Spirit, the divine rage, the inexplicable coming and going of the afflatus. One of the elements here mentioned, the inspiration as the gift of the Holy Spirit, we shall discuss further in the ensuing section of this article.

1. 348-349, lines 7-16, 23-35. This was probably written after the death of the Countess in 1621 (*ibid.*, 2. 242).

[22] *Ibid.*, 1. 245, lines 460-474; the reference is presumably to the song of Moses in Deut. 32: 1-43 (*op. cit.*, 2. 194).

[23] *Ibid.*, 1. 252, line 44.

[24] *Ibid.*, 1. 340-341, lines 64-72.

[25] Robert Herrick, "Not every day fit for Verse," in *Poems*, ed. F. W. Moorman (Oxford, 1915), p. 242.

3

The poetic inspiration as a gratuitous, or *ad extra* grace belonging by appropriation to the Holy Ghost rests upon peculiarly difficult theological beliefs as it concerns this divine agent. We have seen that St. Augustine, like most of the Church Fathers, regarded the Holy Spirit as the direct intermediary between God and the apostolic writers.[26] This endowment or inspiration, however is not restricted to the Third Person of the Trinity; it may be derived from the First or Second Persons. The *ad extra* graces are differentiated from those properly salvationist or redemptionist; hence, their gratuitous nature. In human affairs outside the sphere of salvation, the conventional theological position is that these are by appropriation under the direct supervision of the Holy Spirit, here acting in the capacity of an instrumental intermediary to the First Person, to whom belong the full creationist powers, as the redemptorial powers belong to the Second. Thus, the third of the divine hypostases is likely to be the efficient agent of the other two. From the strictest orthodox position, that of the indivisible unity of the three hypostases—the One and the Three-in-One being perfectly equivalent—an attempt to differentiate the activities of the individual hypostases may be open to serious criticism. But, even in the usages of the New Testament, some uncertainty as to the offices of the Holy Spirit is reflected.[27] From a purely finite point of view these are not so strongly comprehensible and apparent as the actions of the First and Second Persons.

The following aspects of divine grace are acceptable in theological thought: (1) a favor, elicited by man from God; (2) favors as gifts, indicative of the divine disposition towards man; (3) the love of God in actions towards man; (4) God in the person of Christ imparting himself to man; (5) a certain secret and mysterious quality, often conceived of as apart from human relationships; (6) love; (7) supernatural knowledge; (8) the gifts of the Holy Spirit.[28] While not wholly restricted to the

[26] See above, p. 307, note 17.

[27] In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is referred to forty-nine times as πνεῦμα ἅγιον; forty times as ὁ πνεῦμα ἅγιον (W. F. Cobb, *Mysticism and the Creed,* London, 1914, p. 305, note 2).

[28] This classification of the theological graces is based upon Frank Gavin's "The Mediaeval and Modern Roman Conceptions of Grace," in *The Doctrine of Grace,*

eighth aspect of grace listed here, the poetic inspiration as a gratuitous grace is commonly ascribed to the Holy Spirit. The fifth, sixth, and seventh aspects are not here discussed; in the literature of the Renaissance, where any strong infusion of Platonic and Neo-Platonic thought is prevalent, the inspiration of love as a grace influencing the poet may be present; this is infrequent in English verse.[29] Since few of the inspirationist poets were "professional" theologians (Dante and Milton are the obvious exceptions), the Christian poets of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance, in the main, invoked the Holy Spirit for the grace by which they might compose. There is, however, no strict uniformity of usage here. The method of William Browne of Tavistock in the first book of his *Britannia's Pastorals* is revealing:

> And thou which through the Desart and the Deepe,
> Didst lead thy Chosen like a flocke of sheepe:
> As sometime by a Starre thou guidedst them,
> Which fed vpon the plaines of Bethelem;
> So by thy sacred Spirit direct my quill,
> When I shall sing ought of thy Holy hill,
> That times to come, when they my rymes rehearse,
> May wonder at me, and admire my Verse:
> For who but one rapt in Coelestiall fire,
> Can by his Muse to such a pitch aspire.[30]

The invocation to God here to permit the Holy Spirit to guide him is within the limits of orthodox religious belief; Browne's usage is typical of the large number of the inspirationist poets.[31]

ed. W. T. Whitley, with an introduction by the Archbishop of York, London, 1932; see, in particular, pp. 134-135.

[29] *The Fowre Hymnes* of Spenser, notably the last two, may embody the grace of love; see *Hymnes*, ed. Lilian Winstanley (Cambridge, 1916), Introd., pp. xxviii ff.

[30] William Browne, *Works*, ed. Carew Hazlitt (London, 1868), 1. 107.

[31] It should be noted that the poetic inspiration was but one of many such gratuitous graces; others, for example, such as courtesy, kindliness, cleanliness, and the like, may be included. For a masterly discussion of these matters, see James Moffatt, *Grace in the New Testament*, London, 1931, in which the aesthetic notions of grace are fully discussed; see also, G. P. Wetter, *Charis: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des ältesten Christentums*, Leipzig, 1913. "From an early day divine grace had been understood not simply as the kindness or favor of God," writes Professor McGiffert, "shown especially in salvation, but also in an objective sense as something bestowed upon man or infused into them" (A. C. McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought*, New York, 1933, 2. 93). Myles Smith in "The Translators

Of poetic illustrations of the literary inspiration as a gratuitous grace, a small number only can be listed here because of limitations of space; these have been purposely chosen both from mediaeval and from Renaissance verse in order to illustrate an important principle in the discussion of a specifically Christian doctrine of inspiration. This is the principle of the continuity of certain emphatic religio-poetic beliefs sustaining the Renaissance belief in the inspired poet.

In Acts 2: 1-4 there is the description by St. Paul of the visitation of the Pentecost. For various reasons the early Christian poets felt impelled to amplify the biblical narratives. The verses cited below, from *De Actibus Apostolorum* by Arator (*ca.* 490-556) represent such an attempt:

> Spiritus aethera descendens sanctus ab aula
> Irradiat fulgore locum, quo stemma beatum
> Ecclesiae nascentis erat, quibus, igne magistro,
> Imbuit ora calor, dictis fluentibus exit
> Linguarum populosa seges; non litera gessit
> Officium, non ingenii stillavit ab ore
> Vena, nec egregias signavit cera loquelas;
> Sola fuit doctrina fides, opulenta verbi
> Materies, coeleste datum, novis vocis origo
> Quae numerosa venit, totoque ex orbe dissertis
> Sufficit una loque.[32]

This may be described as a kind of theological reporting in verse; the magisterial fire of the Pentecostal Spirit is precisely that propulsive, kinetic energy which the later inspirationist poets asserted was theirs—the true *coeleste datum*. Much more original in conception and imagination than Arator, Prudentius, like later poets in the Christian epic tradition, drew upon his own creative abilities in writing instead of relying upon rhetorical amplification. Some of his comments are extremely signifi-

to the Reader," prefixed to the 1611 revision of the English Bible, thus summed up the rôle of the Holy Spirit: "The author being God, not man; the inditer, the holy Spirit, not the wit of the Apostles or Prophets; the Penmen such as were sanctified from the womb, and endued with a principal portion of God's spirit" (*Preface*, ed. E. J. Goodspeed, Chicago, 1935, p. 20; it is regrettable that this preface has been omitted from the English Bible since the early nineteenth century). The coöperative nature of the production of divinely inspired works is attested to by St. Augustine; see *In Genethliacos*, cap. xvii.

[32] Arator, *De Actibus Apostolorum*, I, lines 119-129, in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, t. 68, pp. 105-106.

cant. Thus, in the *Hamartigenia*, a poem dealing with the murder of Abel, Prudentius termed Moses a " sanctus uaticinator," and piously expressed the hope that he too would receive the same divine inspiration—" inspirante deo." [33] In a deeply pietistic spirit, Prudentius, in the " Epilogus " to his *Carmina*, hoped that his verses—" citos iambicos " and " rotaliles trochaeos " alike—pedestrian though they were, would be acceptable to God.[34]

Wherever we turn in the writings of the learned poets of the Middle Ages instances of this pietistic and fideistic belief in the reality of God's supervision of human productions will be found. In the epilogue to *Elene*, which is presumably autobiographical, Cynewulf wrote that God conferred upon him the power of song.[35] Writing with a pure hagiographic intention, Bede explained that Caedmon, because of his humility and piety, had received the divine grace enabling him to write.[36] In what is probably the first extant allusion to the Nine Muses in English literature, Aldhelm wrote of the gratuitous gifts of God.[37] Centuries later, Bernard of Morlas, remembered, if at all, for his " Urbs Syon aurea " (" Jerusalem the Golden ") recounted in the preface to *De Contemptu Mundi* an ingenuous, yet deeply pietistic account of the renewal of his poetic gifts. Famous for his verses, he had seen the springs of his invention dry up; his heart was cold within him. At length a voice, the Lord's, mysteriously spoke to him:

Et dixit mihi: 'Aperi os tuum, et ego adimplebo illud.' Aperui igitur os meum, quod implevit Dominus spiritu sapientiae et intellectus, ut per illam vera per istum perspicua dicerem. Non ego arroganter, sed omnino humiliter, et ob id audenter affirmaverim, quia nisi spiritus sapientiae et intellectus mihi affuisset et affluxisset, tam difficili metro tam longum opus contexere non sustinuisse.[38]

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[33] Prudentius, *Hamartigenia*, lines 339-345, in *Carmina*, ed. I. Bergman, *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, LXI (1926), 141.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 448.

[35] *Elene*, ed. F. Holthausen (Heidelberg, 1905), lines 1247-1252.

[36] " Visumque est omnibus, caelestem ei a Domino concessam esse gratiam " (Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* IV, cap. 24).

[37] J. H. Pitman, *The Riddles of Aldhelm: Text and Verse Translation* (New Haven, 1925), pp. 4-5.

[38] Thomas Wright, *The Anglo-Latin Satirical Poets and Epigrammatists of the Twelfth Century* (London, 1872), 2. 6.

Expression of the religious origins of verse penetrated more slowly into the vernacular literatures; but from the twelfth century onwards, occurrences of such beliefs are not uncommon. In passing we may note avowals of God's directing hand in the composition of verse in John Walton,[39] John Lydgate,[40] Sir David Lindsay,[41] John Skelton,[42] and Nicholas Grimald.[43] These references constitute a mere handful of those available for anyone who will take the trouble to list them. Yet it is only by such listing that we can fully realize the powerful, cumulative effect upon the Renaissance of this religio-poetic belief in the supervision of creative literature by Deity. Unless we do recognize the genuine basis of belief upon which such poetic professions of faith rested, we are likely to regard the Renaissance doctrine of the inspired poet as mere pedantry and affectation.

Elsewhere in the present discussion, mention has been made of the confirmatory value of the classical tradition in the doctrine of the inspired poet. Even the conception of the poetic inspiration as a " divine fury " was widely available to the poets of the Middle Ages through one of the indispensable encyclopaedias, the *Etymologiarum* of Isidore of Seville. In this, *Etymol.* VIII, cap. 7, Isidore synthesized his views on poetry and poets. Since man first began to speculate about life and the supernatural order, poets have existed. They deal with religion, make living forms more beautiful, praise the illustrious men of the past. Following Varro, Isidore terms the poets *vates,* so designated because of the dynamic powers of their minds— " a vi mentis appellatos." *Vates* is elsewhere applied to priests and prophets (*Etymol.* VII, cap. 12). By a mistaken etymology Isidore connects *vates* with *vesania,* a linguistic attempt to re-

[39] John Walton, *Boethius: De Consolatione Philosophiae,* ed. Mark Science, E. E. T. S., orig. ser., 170 (1927 for 1925), pp. 1, 210-212.

[40] Note Lydgate's "An Invocation to Seynte Anne," with the marginal glosses, " O Lord, inspire my pen to praise St. Anne," and " Let the spirit like a dove descend on me " (*Minor Poems,* ed. H. N. MacCracken, E. E. T. S., 107, ex. ser., 1911 for 1910, pp. 130-131). The section of Lydgate's *Fall of Princes,* III, lines 3839-3864, entitled " The Governance of Poets," is a suggestive summary of the responsibilities of the Christian poets.

[41] Lindsay's prologue to *The Monarch,* lines 216-240, expresses with a marked rigoristic point of view the duties of a specifically Christian verse.

[42] Skelton, *Works,* ed. Dyce, 1. 221-222.

[43] Nicholas Grimald, " Epistola nuncupatoria," prefixed to *Christus Redivivus,* in *Poems,* ed. L. R. Merrill (New Haven, 1925), pp. 110-112.

late with the term to the idea of madness. At any rate, Isidore, probably echoing Cicero, thus describes the " inspired " Roman poets:

proinde poetae Latine vates olim, scripta eorum vaticinia dicebantur, quod vi quadam et quasi vesania in scribendo commoverentur. . . Etiam per furorem divini eodem erant nomine, quia et ipse quoque pleraque versibus efferebant.[44]

In classifying the various types and techniques of verse, Isidore gives his full approval to the allegorizing method: " officium autem poetae in eo, est ut ea, quae vere gesta sunt, in alias species obliquis figurationibus cum decore aliquo conversa transducat." In discussing the prophets, Isidore classifies the various types of vision to which they and the poets are receptive; these range from the plenary inspiration of Moses to the mental intuition, all of these being derived from the Holy Spirit.[45] These views become the commonplaces of later mediaeval thought.

In the connections between the literary and and theological doctrines of inspiration, it is important to notice that no problems of dogmatic theology are involved, nor any denominational differences. While it is true that the Protestant poet may be inclined to emphasize more strongly than the Catholic writer, the individualistic aspects of the experience of inspiration—the English inspirationist poets, together with the Protestant Du Bartas, do this, I think, more consistently than the poets of the *Pléiade*, most of whom were adherents of the Catholic faith—no doctrinal problems are involved in the belief in the gratuitous graces. For this reason the *locus classicus* of the doctrine will be found in the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas. In the *Summa*, II-II, Q. clxxi-clxxviii, St. Thomas summarized the doctrine of the gratuitous graces with reference to the inspiration of the prophets. The minds of these men were instructed in two ways, by express revelation or by a most mysterious instinct to which the mind is subjected without being aware of it. The prophet was moved by the Holy Ghost to apprehend something, to speak something, or to do something. These activities may be combined or may appear separately. The feeling of certitude which results from the supernatural

[44] Isidore, *Etymologiarum*, ed. Faustino Arevalo (Rome, 1797) 3. 365-366.
[45] *Ibid.*, VII, cap. 8.

endowment, from any of the forms of divine illumination, is greater than that which results from natural reason. A person accustomed to divine illumination may, however, finally be unable to distinguish between the source of his thought in the heavenly instinct, or prompting, and the thoughts of his own mind. Should this occur, the Holy Spirit will soon set his mind aright. Implicit in the teachings of St. Thomas and in the poetic expressions of the doctrine of inspiration as a gratuitous grace is the belief that these *charismata data* are accessory values to the Christian soul and mind. Pervenient and irresistible grace deals with the problem of human salvation; whereas the gratuitous graces enlarge the scope of human understanding.[46]

As one surveys the invocations of the genuine inspirationist poets, together with their analyses of the inspiration itself, one fact is always clear: the inadequacy of the human mind to deal with themes of an elevated or transcendent nature. The finite mind was limited, its perceptions clouded by the senses, its conclusions liable to gross error, unless in all its operations it was beneficently guided by the Holy Spirit, by Providence. This is that " weakness of man," referred to earlier in the present discussion. Above all, the poet was most vividly conscious of this weakness when he essayed to write on the Christian epic, and it was this theme which seemed to attract the poets genuinely and sincerely accepting the doctrine of the divine inspiration of the creative writer.

Along with this sense of human limitations and the inadequacy of the poet to deal with elevated themes, there is frequently expressed in the invocations and in related passages the idea that if the " heav'nly Eloquence," as Giles Fletcher terms it, is bestowed on the poet he will write " nimbly ":

> He that his pen but in that fountaine dipps,
> Now nimbly will the golden phrases flie,
> And shed forth streams of choycest rhetoric,
> Welling celestiall torrents out of poesie.[47]

Virtually a commonplace among the inspirationist poets, in

[46] N. P. Williams, *The Grace of God* (London, 1930), pp. 26-27.

[47] Giles Fletcher, *Christ's Victorie in Heaven,* in *Poems,* ed. F. S. Boas (Cambridge, 1908-1910) 1. 30.

fact, was their belief that all the qualities necessary for the creative writer, "invention," judgment, imagination, facility, the rules of art, originality, all these were dependent upon the divine inspiration. From many such passages let us look at two. In 1593 the first edition of Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* was published at Rome, a book dealing with emblematic and allegorical symbolisms, later editions of which were illustrated. In the edition used (Padua, 1611) a cut illustrating *Entheus*, or *Furor Poeticus*, is reproduced with Ripa's comment here given in part:

perche è il furor poetico vna soprabondanza di viuacità de spirti . . . & de' concetti merauigliosi, i quali parendo impossible che si possono hauere solo per dona della natura, sono stimati doni particolari, & *singolar gratia del Cielo* [italics mine].[48]

The second is from Edward Benlowes' preface to *Theophilia* (1652):

Know, reader, that Divine Poesy is the internal triumph of the mind, rapt with St. Paul into the third heaven, where she contemplates ineffables. . . Now 'tis Judgement begets the strength, Invention the ornaments of a poem; both these joined form Wit, which is the agility of spirits: vivacity of Fancy in a florid style disposeth light and life to a poem, wherein the masculine and refined pleasures of the understanding transcend the feminine and sensual of the eye: From the excellence of Fancy proceed grateful similes, apt metaphors, &. Sublime poets are by Nature strengthened, by the power of mind inflamed, and by divine rapture inspired.[49]

Joshua Sylvester, while translating the *Sepmaine* of Du Bartas, interpolated an invocation of his own in "Eden," the first part of the "First Day of the Second Week." Sylvester's explanation of this was that he too needed the divine inspiration:

[the] Translator, considering his own weaknesse and insufficiency for a Worke so rare & excellent . . . craueth also the assistance of

[48] Ripa, *Iconologia*, pp. 191-192. I have noted some sixteen editions of this work, the last being the English translation by George Richardson, London, 1779. For those students interested in the Muse conventions of Renaissance verse, it is significant that Ripa plainly thought of them as allegorical symbolisms only. In the 1611 edition, their significations are given, pp. 368-371; no other figures from Greek and Roman mythology are discussed.

[49] Edward Benlowes, "Preface," *Theophilia*, in *Caroline Poets*, ed. George Saintsbury (Oxford, 1905-1921) 1.319.

the Highest, that (at least) his endeuour may both stir vp some abler Spirit to vndertake this Taske; and also prouoke all other good Wits to take in hand some holy Argument: and withall, that Him-self may be for euer sincerely affected, and (as it were) thoroughly seasoned with the sweet relish of these sacred and religious discourses.

Sylvester then proceeded, in a humourless, "uninspired" pedestrian verse, to make a plea for the grace of inspiration in order that he, the English translator, may be of aid to his countrymen:

> And gratious Guide, which doost all grace infuse,
> Since it hath pleas'd thee task my tardy Muse
> With these high Theams, that through mine Art-les Pen
> This holy Lamp may light my Country-men:
> Ah, teach my hand, touch mine vnlearned lips;
> Least, as the Earths grosse body doth Eclipse
> Bright Cynthia's beams, when it is interpos'd
> Twixt her and Phoebus: so mine ill-dispos'd,
> Dark, gloomy Ignorance, obscure the rayes
> Of this diuine Sun of these learned dayes.
> O! furnish me with an vn-vulgar stile,
> That I by this may wean our wanton Ile
> From Ouids heirs, and their vn-hallowed spell
> Heer charming senses, chayning soules in Hell.
> Let this prouoke our modern Wits to sacre
> Their wondrous gifts to honour thee, their Maker:
> That our mysterious *Elfine* Oracle,
> Deep, morall, graue, Inuentions miracle;
> My deer sweet Daniel, sharp-conceipted, brief,
> Ciuill, sententious, for pure accents chief:
> And our new Naso, that so passionates
> Th'heroike sighes of loue-sick Potentates:
> May change their subiect, and aduance their wings
> Vp to these higher and more holy things.
> And if (sufficient rich in self-inuention)
> They scorn (as I) to liue of Strangers Pension,
> Let them deuise new Weeks, new works, new wayes
> To celebrate the supreme Prince of praise.
> And let not me (good Lord) be like the Lead
> Which to som city from som Conduit-head
> Brings holsom water, yet (self-wanting sense)
> It self receiues no drop of comfort thence:
> But rather, as the thorough-season But
> Wherein the tears of death-prest Grapes are put,

Retains (long after all the wine is spent)
Within it self the liquors liuely sent:
Let me still sauour of these sacred sweets
Till Death fold-vp mine earth in earthen sheets;
Least, my young layes, now prone to preach thy glory
To Brutus heyres, blush at mine elder story.[50]

Verse like this carries with it its own obvious comments—the simple, naive, unaffected pietistic intention. To poets like Sylvester the direct supervision of Providence over poetry appears to have been an article of faith so apparent that no real defense or proof was necessary.

Turning from the verse of Sylvester, in which, unhappily, Providence was not lavish in bestowing the creative grace, to the invocations of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (I, 1-26, III, 1-55, VII, 1-39, IX, 1-47), we have the finest evidences in the literature of the English Renaissance of the kinetic values of the doctrine of the inspired poet. It is impertinent to praise these lines for their perfection of form and expression; we should note, however, that they come at the very end of a centuries-old literary and religious tradition, that these invocations echo in line after line the rich, cumulative inheritances of this tradition. Perhaps for this very reason, a good deal of debate has centered about them. One of these moot passages concerns *Paradise Lost*, I, 17-26:

And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all temples the upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first
Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread,
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss,
And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;
That to the highth of this great argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.[51]

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[50] Joshua Sylvester, *The Divine Weekes* (1611), pp. 216-217. For other translated passages from the *Sepmaine* bearing upon the Christian doctrine of inspiration, see pp. 1, 59-60, 91-92, 145, 216, 265, 298-299, 358-359, 360, 436-437, 539, 540-542, for significant references; see also, Miss Lily B. Campbell, "The Christian Muse," *Huntington Library Bulletin*, 8 (1935). 29-30. Du Bartas, like Milton, was in no sense of the word an innovator or an originator of the conventions and traditions of the Christian doctrine of inspiration.

[51] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. A. W. Verity (Cambridge, 1921), pp. 9-10.

I take this passage to be an invocation to the Holy Spirit. In terms which seem to be as clear and unequivocal as the poetic statement can well be, Milton is here invoking the Third Person for its beneficent functions towards a human being, for the graces of the upright and pure heart, and for the illumination of his mind, the *donum* or grace by which the finite mind of the poet may comprehend the creationist and redemptorial powers of the First Person. It will be noted that Milton carefully points out that the Spirit was present at creation, and not that the Spirit here invoked possesses itself creationist attributes; it is that supernatural being whose offices are benevolent and instructive and illuminating as regards human beings. The views here expressed by Milton are paralleled in his *Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes* (1659):

> We of these ages, having no other divine rule or authority from without us, warrantable to one another as a common ground, but the holy Scripture, and no other within us but the illumination of the Holy Spirit, so interpreting that Scripture as warrantable only to ourselves, and to such whose consciences we can so persuade, can have no other ground in matters of religion but only from the Scriptures. And these being not possible to be understood without this divine illumination.[52]

In contrast to orthodox Trinitarianism, Milton in dealing with the creationist powers of the First Person in *Paradise Lost* and in *The Christian Doctrine* reveals Arian—or, at least, semi-Arian—tendencies. This heterodox thought in Milton's later years should not be extended, in the opinion of the present writer, to a consideration of the doctrine of poetic inspiration in his works.[53] The poetic inspiration as an *ad extra* grace, merely one of many *charismata data* belonging by appropriation

[52] Milton, *Prose Works* (Bohn edition) 2. 523.

[53] For those interested in the problems of Milton's inspiration, attention is called to two works by Dr. Maurice Kelley of great value, '*De Doctrina Christiana*' *as a Gloss upon Paradise Lost*, Princeton Doctoral Diss., 1933; "Milton and the Third Person of the Trinity," *SP* 32 (1935). 221-234. It is the belief of Dr. Kelley that Milton directly invoked the First Person in the appeals for aid in composition of his epic. These matters are extremely complex both as they concern dogmatic theology and as they are treated in the verse and prose of Milton. If, as the present writer believes, the divine inspiration of poets is one of the gratuitous graces, the problem of the individual poet's being professedly Arian or Athanasian in his view of the First and Second Persons, has little bearing upon the doctrine of inspiration. I hope elsewhere to deal with some of these problems.

to the Holy Spirit, possesses an accessory value only. While the conceit that God himself was a Poet was a fairly common one in both mediaeval and Renaissance literature, the inspirationist poets were not sufficiently presumptuous as to suppose that their creation of poems was comparable in any respect to those creationist powers by which the First Person made heaven and earth and all that in them is. "Omne bonum datum fit de caelo descendens a patre luminum," wrote Natale Conti, paraphrasing James 1: 17.[54] In the *Confessions*, I, 13, 21, St. Augustine described God as "lumen cordis mei et panis oris intus animae meae et virtus maritans mentem meam et sinum cogitationis meae." As every orthodox believer will agree, these views of Conti and St. Augustine are acceptable alike to the Arian and to the Athanasian, to all men of faith: in Christianity all things are finally referable to God as the creative force in the universe, in one sense, the only creative power therein. But when we turn to the doctrine of the inspired poet as a basically religious doctrine, we have seen that the poets themselves attributed the afflatus most commonly to the Holy Ghost—the instance cited above from William Browne's prayer to God to allow the Spirit to aid him in his writing, is typical and, one feels, significant. The present writer is inclined to think that Milton did likewise.

4

A discussion of the doctrine of the divinely inspired poet is likely to raise more problems than it settles. A thorough study of these problems in the literature of the English Renaissance is needed, if only to avoid an over-simplification or the supposition that inspirational passages in English can be disposed of by a reference in the notes to parallel passages in Homer, Hesiod, Plato, or Virgil. On occasion, "hoti's business" is not so easily settled. It is almost an act of supererogation to speak of the influence of the classics upon Renaissance literature. In the doctrine of the English inspirationists the thought and the example of the classical theorists exercise a by no means negligible influence, an influence which, it has been remarked elsewhere in this discussion, appears to have been substantiating and

[54] Natale Conti, *Mythologiae* (1551); the quotation cited above is from the Padua edition of 1616, p. 406.

confirmatory. It is perhaps a case of putting first things first. As far as the doctrine of poetic inspiration was concerned, this consisted in seeking its valid base, in Christian belief. The English inspirationists seem usually to have followed the spirit of Ascham's words that he

> would haue a good student passe and iorney through all Authors both Greke and Latin: but he that will dwell in these few bookes onelie: first, in Gods holie Bible, and than ioyne with it, Tullie in Latin, Plato, Aristotle: Xenophon: Isocrates: and Demosthenes in Greke: must nedes proue an excellent man.[55]

" First, in God's holy Bible "—this describes the practice of the inspirationist poets, as it does the relative influence upon the doctrine of the classical and the Christian traditions.

In the inspirationist literature of the English Renaissance, certain other specific problems are involved. The first of these concerns the connections between the doctrine of the inspired poet and the widely current mythology of the Nine Muses as the inspirers and patronesses of verse. These Muse conventions reflect (1) a rhetorical tradition virtually uninterrupted through the Middle Ages into the Renaissance; (2) allegorical symbolisms, close in kind and nature to the emblems; (3) traditional associations with learning and the fine arts, connections which have their beginnings with the mediaeval encyclopaedists and are continued by the Renaissance mythographers, such as Gyraldus, Conti, and Linocier. It is fantastic to suppose that any evidence of a pagan-Christian antithesis is contained in the handling of the Muse conventions by the English Renaissance poets. In this connection, moreover, it is important to note that many of the most revealing passages in English verse bearing upon latitudinarian or poetic inspiration make no mention of the Nine Muses at all.

The problem of deciding in the case of a specific poet whether or not he may be properly termed an inspirationist offers obvious difficulties. It involves a thorough review of the entire work of the poet, his prose as well as his verse, if he has used both mediums, the chief intellectual interests, the choice of subjects and underlying themes. Only where these synthesize around

[55] Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, ed. Aldis Wright (Cambridge, 1904), pp. 188-189.

convictions principally Christian, or at any rate pietistic, may we be fairly certain that his professions of a belief in the divine inspiration represent an undoubtedly sincere and personal acceptance of the traditional doctrines. The solution of such a problem is easiest when the poet reveals an interest in the Christian epic and the associated hexaemeral themes.

The number of authentic inspirationist poets in England during the Renaissance is a small one, compared with the group of French inspirationists, centering principally around the *Pléiade*. Early in the sixteenth century, there is Skelton, a kind of Mr. Facing-Both-Ways between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The profession of belief in an indubitable, Christian inspiration made by Skelton in his *Replication* is one of the fullest in English inspirationist literature. For various reasons, a thorough study of the English doctrine of the inspired poet must include Edmund Spenser, George Chapman, the members of the so-called seventeenth-century Spenserian group, George Wither, and Milton. There are others, also, who should be included. There is Drayton, for example, luxuriating in the rhetoric of the Muses throughout his poetry. Donne suggests a fervent belief in the divine oversight of poets as well as of priests. Even Shakespeare, no follower of the transcendencies of the inspirationists, certainly knew many of their technical terms, and ironically employed them in the *Sonnets*. Of all the major English poets, Marlowe seems to have been most indifferent; Ben Jonson, for example, gives at best a very qualified approval.

To us the doctrine of the divinely inspired poet seems to have about it a good deal of what Professor Lovejoy has termed "metaphysical pathos."[56] This sort of criticism would not, I think, have been clear to the conservative, learned, and devout poets—the professed inspirationists—of the age, for whom, as we have seen, the sanctions and doctrines of their faith supplied a firm foundation upon which their poetry rested.

The George Washington University

[56] A. O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), p. 11.

VITA

Courtland Darke Baker was born in Cumberland, Maryland, on 23 August, 1899. After two years at the University of Virginia, he transferred to The George Washington University, where he was graduated B.A. in 1924. In 1925 he received the master's degree from this institution.

Since 1926 he has been in turn an instructor, assistant professor, and associate professor of English at The George Washington University.